

Sunset in the Rearview by TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)

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Summary:

El is scared to learn how to drive, and she's not very good at it either, but she enlists Mike's help to teach her

Sunset in the Rearview

Author's Note:

Title is from the song Rearview by Bad Suns

“Okay, so you’re gonna want to turn left up here.” Mike pointed to the intersection up ahead, and looked over at his girlfriend in the driver’s seat of his ‘86 Buick Estate, his 16th birthday gift from his parents.

El didn’t respond, reverting to her quiet self when she was stressed. She motioned the turn signal down and kept her eyes glued to the road ahead of her, beads of sweat forming at her forehead.

This wasn’t how she envisioned learning how to drive. Originally Hopper was supposed to teach her, but as much as El loved her adoptive father, he yelled when he was stressed, and after one experience driving around a parking lot with him, she knew she wouldn’t be able to do it again. So she had begged Mike for his help, with her puppy dog eyes and pouting tone that he could never turn down.

El had been excited to learn how to drive. She didn’t have a car or anything, but still, she loved the idea of the freedom of it all. She could go anywhere, feeling the leather of the steering wheel beneath her hands as she could control everything. No more depending on other people for rides, no more being confined to wherever she could bike or walk to when she couldn’t get a ride. She could go anywhere.

That excitement, however, washed away the second she sat in the driver’s seat. Her father was the chief of police, she heard far too many stories about awful car crashes and people being reckless. As soon as she shifted the gear into drive, her excitement turned to crippling fear. She didn’t want this responsibility or this danger. Suddenly driving felt more like an impending doom than a chance for freedom.

Her eyes were fixed on the upcoming intersection. She pressed her foot down on the accelerator and shot forward, becoming so lost in

her thoughts she didn't even notice as the turn became closer and closer.

“El, slow down!” Mike screamed from the passenger seat, snapping her out of her thoughts as she slammed on the breaks. The car lurched to a stop, and the duo in the car fell forward. A long honk was emitted from behind them, but they ignored it as they caught their breath.

“What the hell was that?” Mike turned to her, “You have to pay attention to the road!”

El’s face fell upon hearing his disappointment. This was exactly why she was scared to drive; everything was constantly just one mistake away from disaster, “I- I’m sorry. I got distracted.”

Mike let out a long sigh and rubbed his temples, “It’s fine, it was just a mistake. But try and pay better attention next time.” El nodded sheepishly and she took a deep breath before moving her foot back onto the gas pedal.

Things went smoothly at first. She kept a good speed as the upcoming intersection came closer, and Mike thought he could let out the breath he’d been holding in. But then they were up to the turn, and El didn’t slow down, and only moved the wheel slightly to the left, not far enough to keep them on track.

“Turn, turn, turn, turn, turn!” Mike yelled as El jerked the wheel as far left as she could, keeping her foot all the way down on the accelerator. Mike let out a yelp that he knew he would be teased for if the other boys were around, and dove to clutch the handle above him.

“I’m turning!” El screamed back, and Mike scoffed. *Yeah, now you’re turning.*

The car ended up in the wrong lane, but luckily there were no other cars there for El to hit, and she was able to swerve back into the right lane. “Okay,” Mike sighed, “We didn’t die. We survived. We’re fine.”

“Stop doing that!” El retaliated.

“Stop what?!”

“Being so dramatic!” She turned to glare at him, “It’s not helping!”

“Well I wouldn’t be so dramatic if you’d just *keep your eyes on the road!*” El turned away from him and looked forward. Sure enough, she was swerving into the wrong lane again, this time with an oncoming car barreling right towards them. Mike leaned over and grabbed the wheel himself, tugging it back into the right lane and straightening them out.

Once they were back in their lane, El pushed Mike’s hands off the wheel and took control herself. She pulled the car over to the side and put it in park, crossing her arms over her chest and pouting.

“El...” Mike started, but she turned to look out the window, away from him, “El, I’m sorry.”

She continued to give him the silent treatment for a minute, listening to him ramble.

“I’m sorry, I really am. I know it’s stressful and I shouldn’t have yelled at you. I was stupid. El? El, please talk to me.”

Eventually he broke down her wall. Even when she was mad at him, El could never stay away from Mike for long. He was still the person she wanted when she was upset, even if he was the one making her upset.

She turned back around to face him, and stretched herself over the gearshift to cuddle into his side. It was an awkward angle, but Mike wrapped his arm around her to pull her closer, and they made it work. His face was pushed into her hair, and hers was leaning on his chest. She took in his scent and relaxed, feeling her anxiety from driving wash away and her heart rate slow.

“I’m sorry for being so bad at this,” she whispered into his shirt, and she could feel him shake his head.

“No,” Mike spoke into her curls, “Don’t apologize. Everybody is bad when they first start learning. I shouldn’t have lost my patience. I’m sorry, I love you.”

“I love you too.” She snuggled deeper into his chest.

The two sat that way for a few minutes, listening to the sounds of each other’s breathing, and the occasional car passing by. Eventually, Mike lifted his head up, which alerted El’s attention. “Do you want me to drive home, or do you want to try again?”

“I wanna try again,” she declared, though she sounded unsure. “But only if you promise you won’t get mad if I mess up.”

“I promise,” he assured her, “I know you can do this. It’s all about confidence, I believe in you.”

El still looked apprehensive, so he continued, “How about we try this instead?” Mike leaned over to the steering wheel, putting his hands on top of El’s and moving the wheel side to side. “This way I can help if anything goes wrong, at least until you get the hang of it.”

El nodded, and Mike shifted the gear into drive, and together they took off from the curb. They traveled down the road, and El relaxed her hands knowing she wasn’t doing this alone. They rode around the neighborhood a few times with Mike whispering reassurances in her ear.

“Yeah, that’s good.”

“Now brake slightly.”

“You’re doing perfect.”

Eventually Mike pulled his hands away and leaned back into the passenger seat. El was so focused on the road she hardly seemed to notice he was gone. She went around the neighborhood one more time, this time her muscles knowing exactly what to do. She slowed down and sped up at the right times, made all the turns perfectly, never started to swerve.

“There! You’re getting the hang of it!” Mike exclaimed, snapping El out of her focus and bringing it to her attention that she’d been driving entirely on her own for the past several minutes.

“I’m doing it!” She beamed, and Mike felt his heart speed up. She

turned to him with a look of astonishment across her face, "I'm driving!"

Mike couldn't help but laugh at her excitement. He figured that in her glory she'd keep going around the neighborhood some more, but instead she pulled over to the curb and looked at him.

She had that glint in her eyes that made Mike's heart swell. He loved seeing her so happy. He loved seeing her smile. He loved *her* so, so much.

"Thank you for teaching me." She grinned.

Mike smiled down at her, leaning slightly closer to her face, "Well you are my favorite student."

Before he could say anything else, El closed the gap between them, wrapping her hands around his neck and pulling him closer. The kiss only lasted a second, but that was enough to take both their breath away. El pulled back, resting her forehead in the bend of Mike's nose and grinning.

After a few seconds she leaned back to return to the driver's position, but she wasn't used to the cramped space. Her elbow went straight into the steering wheel, and the sound of the honk caused them both to jump.

A deep blush erupted on Mike's cheeks as he looked around for any grumpy neighbors who may have seen, while El giggled at the sound.

"Sorry," she squeaked.

"Don't worry about it," Mike stammered, his blush washing away, "You're still new in the car after all."

El seemed to contemplate his words for a moment before replying. "Well then maybe you should keep teaching me."

Mike's blush returned when he realized she absolutely wasn't talking about more driving. "Already on it" he whispered, with his breath hot on her face. She only had a millisecond to smirk before he dove down to capture her lips once more.

Learning to drive was scary, but it definitely had it's perks.